

County Road Maintenance in Minnesota

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I have had the pleasure of helping conduct a County Highway Institute in Minnesota the last two years. It is not surprising, therefore, that Minnesota engineers should send me down here to attend your Road School which has been conducted annually for the last 33 years. I will take back many suggestions for improving our institute.

The statement was made here that one should not presume to impose on the time of experts of an industry without establishing his qualifications to do so. My qualifications are limited; but, as I said, I came to learn, not to teach.

I am one of the 97 County Highway Engineers in Minnesota. My county is Kandiyohi County. It is 90 miles west of Minneapolis and St. Paul in what we call the south central part, and is in the rich farming area of Minnesota. I will have been a County Highway Engineer 30 years this coming April. In my earlier days I was in a county in the northern part of the state. There I converted some 400 miles of logging roads into a fair system of highways. The place where I am now is considerably like your agricultural area except that you have a longer growing season. We have a longer winter.

I know that most of you saw Mr. Motl's pictures of snow plowing and winter maintenance in Minnesota. These pictures are typical of Kandiyohi County. This condition exists annually over a period of from three to five months. A couple of winters ago we opened the season with a snow blizzard on November 6, and we plowed from then until nearly April first. I have in my office a two-way radio station, and all my snow plows are equipped with two-way radios. This is not a toy. It is for the preservation of life and property as well as for directing the activities of the equipment. We have plowed snow three months 24 hours a day. Three months without locking the office door, and when the plows go out in the morning I wave goodbye to 62 dollars per hour. Well, so much for Kandiyohi County.

DATA ON MINNESOTA ROADS

Minnesota consists of 87 counties with a total population of something like 2,800,000 and an assessed valuation of \$1,305,000,000.

We receive about \$8,000,000 from a real estate tax, \$8,000,000 from a gas tax, and \$2,000,000 from Federal Aid. The counties maintain 42,000 miles of road with this \$18,000,000, which gives them about \$430 per mile per year.

About 60,000 miles of roads are maintained by the townships on a real estate tax levied by the township officers.

Every county in Minnesota has a County Highway Engineer appointed by the County Board for a term of two years. He is in charge of all highway work of the county and the forces employed therein. The County Engineer keeps an account of all the highway funds of the county and submits periodic reports to the county and state. He maintains survey crews and a drafting room in which he can get out plans for any work up to and including Federal Aid. He is also equipped to supervise the construction of the work he plans.

All the counties maintain their roads, and some have equipment for construction by force account, but most of the county construction is done by contract under the plans and supervision of the County Engineer.

Some counties furnish cars to the engineer; in others, the engineer uses his car on a mileage basis and receives five cents per mile for its use. We have the same problems and complaints that you do. Some like a county car, some prefer the private car. I drive my own car, and the public examiner figures that I work overtime to get mileage, but at five cents per mile I don't believe anyone does that. Wages seem to be about the same as here. I think you have more urban area than Minnesota, and wages in those areas are usually higher.

The Boards of County Commissioners are quite a power in Minnesota. Everyone from the County Engineer to the Legislature listens when they speak, and if they ask for something it is usually granted. It would appear that this condition exists in Indiana also.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

I believe my visit here would be of little value if I did not leave my observations with you, and then return to Minnesota and tell them what you have that they should copy.

I believe Minnesota has stronger county highway departments than you have. I think you are depending on the State Highway Department

to solve too many of your problems. They will never do it. They will help you if you set out to solve them yourself. America was made in the rural or local community (you might say the county), and the greater part of our government should be maintained within the county or we will fail at the capitol.

I am not going to argue the virtues of a federal gas tax to support a Federal Aid secondary program. We have the federal gas tax, we have the Federal Aid secondary program, it's liable to stay. It's money, it's good money, and you need this money!

It is the desire of the government that this money be made available to you for the greatest public benefit, and the Public Roads Administration has set it up to conform with this idea. The program is very practical. They have cut the red tape and the standards to the limit. It is down to county requirements. Every county in Indiana should participate in this Federal Aid secondary program.

Minnesota counties have one complaint. There is not enough of this money. We have found it advisable to establish a County Division in the State Highway Department to coordinate the activities of the counties with that of the State in the conduct of the Federal Aid program. We have established, in this way, a friendly cooperative working spirit between the county and state highway departments, and I would recommend this procedure or program to you.

Thank you for your kindness in allowing me to come and join in this wonderful road school with you. I hope Minnesota can do something to repay your hospitality.